

It is, by common consent, a good thing for people to get back to nature. —Aldo Leopold

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has statutory responsibility to manage the Commonwealth's wildlife and inland fisheries, and to protect state and federally threatened or endangered species (excluding plants and insects). The mission of DGIF is *to maintain optimum populations of all species of wildlife and fish to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunities for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; and to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting, and fishing.*

On November 7, 2000, the people of the Commonwealth voted to amend the Virginia Constitution to include the right of all citizens to hunt and fish. *Article XI. Section 4. Right of the people to hunt, fish, and harvest game. The people have a right to hunt, fish, and harvest game, subject to such regu-*

lations and restrictions as the General Assembly may prescribe by general law. The amendment became effective January 1, 2001.

Additionally, DGIF has specific authority to acquire and develop lands and waters for public hunting, fishing and public boating access to enhance recreational use of fish and wildlife resources. DGIF is a special fund agency whose operational and capital revenue is generated through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, boat titling and registration fees, boat sales and use taxes, a portion of federal taxes on related outdoor recreational equipment and a portion of the state sales tax on hunting, fishing and recreation-related outdoor equipment purchases.

The 2006 *Virginia Outdoors Survey (VOS)* indicates that Virginians spend 11.2 million activity days hunting, which makes it the 22nd most popular activity.



Hunting is the 22nd most popular outdoor activity. Photo by DGIF.

Freshwater fishing is the seventh most popular activity, some of which occurs on the more than 3,000 miles of trout streams and 25,000 miles of warm water rivers and streams. Boating is the 10th most popular recreation activity, and more than 50 percent of the population felt that more public access to the state's waters is needed.

Findings

- The 2006 VOS found that 50.2 percent of Virginians felt that public access to water for boating, fishing, swimming and beach use was the most needed recreation facility in the Commonwealth.
- Virginians spend almost 11.2 million activity days sport hunting annually.
- Most public hunting lands in Virginia lie west of the Blue Ridge.
- Since September 11, 2001, military bases curtailed the acreage open for public hunting. This has created a significant shortage of public hunting lands in some regions of eastern Virginia.
- Some of the demand for hunting is met on private property. The statewide recreational inventory does not include private lands available for hunting.
- Fishing is the seventh most popular outdoor recreational activity in Virginia.
- Recreational fishery resources include some of the most varied opportunities found in any state, ranging from native brook trout fishing in small mountain streams, to off-shore saltwater fishing for tuna and billfish.
- The 2006 VOS indicates that boating is the 10th most popular activity among Virginians.
- According to a 2003 Responsive Management Survey conducted for the Northeast Conservation Information and Education Association, more than 51 percent of all Virginians viewed wildlife either near their home or took a trip in the previous year to watch wildlife. Sixty-five percent of all Virginians responded that they have participated in wildlife viewing.
- Approximately 80 percent of Virginia's wildlife habitat is in private ownership.
- Total expenditures on wildlife watching in Virginia in 2001 amounted to \$789 million. This included \$172 million for travel-related expenses. Non-Virginia residents spent \$94 million in 2001.

- DGIF maintains a list of 120 state endangered and threatened species (including subspecies) under its jurisdiction, 58 of which also are listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Recommendations

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries should:

- Continue to provide a professional law enforcement presence through effective conservation law enforcement training.
- Expand educational programs offered to the public that will emphasize environmental awareness.
- Use the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan, completed in September 2005, as a roadmap for future wildlife conservation decisions in the Commonwealth (www.dgif.virginia.gov). This proactive plan examined the health of all wildlife to prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitats before they become too rare and costly to protect (see Appendix G for more information about the Wildlife Action Plan).
- Evaluate biannually strategies to manage specific populations of waterfowl, fish, big game, small game, non-game, furbearers and exotic species.
- Establish long-term monitoring areas in each major habitat type in partnership with other agencies or organizations wherever appropriate.
- Continue surveys and inventories documenting distributions and habitat associations for non-game wildlife species.
- Complete recovery plans for state-listed threatened and endangered species, and establish public outreach programs with citizen advisory groups.
- Continue conservation and management of quality wildlife habitats through public and private cooperative efforts that include conservation easements, leases, gifts and acquisitions.
- Continue investigating and monitoring the occurrence and distribution of wildlife diseases associated with wildlife populations.
- Increase angling access, including shoreline fishing and picnic areas on warm water streams and lakes, wheelchair-accessible facilities at trout fishing areas where conditions are suitable, and overnight camping areas accessible by water for boaters.



Hunting is the 22nd most popular outdoor activity. Photo by DGIF.

- Provide increased angling opportunity through fisheries management, access development and appropriate stocking of fish.
- Continue to develop trail systems within wildlife management areas to facilitate access for nature study, birdwatching, hunting and fishing.
- Provide increased wildlife viewing opportunities on state and private lands through cooperative agreements and partnerships.
- Place a priority on acquisition of public hunting lands east of the Blue Ridge.
- Establish a formal process for evaluating and developing public access sites for bridge crossings of recreational waterways. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will continue to comment on highway projects, including all state and federally funded bridge projects. If DCR knows that a locality wants an alternative bridge design at a particular location, they will include that request in the comments that are provided to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

DGIF responsibilities

In the execution of its statutory responsibilities, DGIF provides access to lands owned by public and private entities through a combination of cooperative manage-

ment agreements and by acquiring and managing wildlife management areas. The Commonwealth owns, through DGIF, 36 wildlife management areas comprising 200,000 acres (see Map IX-4). DGIF also helps manage wildlife on an additional two million acres of land owned by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense, Virginia Department of Forestry, DCR and a number of private entities. DGIF also maintains four wildlife refuge areas totaling 1,060 acres of wildlife habitat where hunting is not permitted.

Fishery resources

DGIF has constructed and maintains 35 public fishing lakes with a combined total of 3,318 acres. In addition, the department has agreed to manage fishery resources through contractual arrangements with public entities on 24 large reservoirs and 166 small impoundments that comprise more than 173,000 acres of impounded water. Access is maintained to a large portion of the Commonwealth's 25,000 miles of warm water streams and rivers, as well as 3,000 miles of native and wild trout water.

Approximately 1.2 million trout of catchable size are stocked annually in more than 600 miles of streams and 400 acres of lakes included in DGIF's catchable trout program. The nine DGIF fish hatcheries produce and stock 10–20 million fish each year. DGIF has,

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B&W Map to come

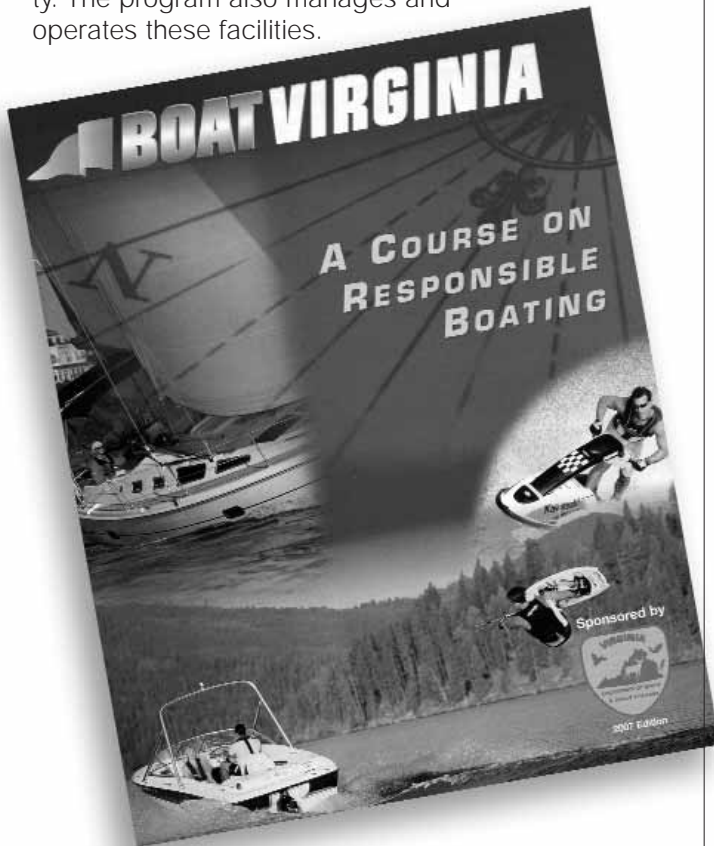
State Fish and Wildlife Management

along with partners on Virginia rivers, been active in the restoration of anadromous fish. Most notably, DGIF, the James River Association and the City of Richmond with public and private support completed the Boshers Dam Fish Passage in early 1999. For the first time in almost 200 years, the James River between Richmond and Lynchburg is open to migratory fish, such as shad and river herring, to spawn in their historic habitat.

DGIF worked with several partners to remove the Embury Dam on the Rappahannock River to reopen historic spawning grounds above Fredericksburg, and is currently stocking this important river with American shad as part of the restoration program. This represents an outstanding example of public-private partnerships to enhance and protect fish and wildlife habitat.

Boating Access Program

The Boating Access Program provides 219 boating access sites across the Commonwealth. Types of boating access provided include boat ramps, boat slides, low-water ramps and shoreline access depending on the site characteristics and water quality. The program also manages and operates these facilities.



Boating safety courses are offered each year. Photo by DGIF.



Boater registration is handled by DGIF. Photo by DGIF.

Education and outreach

The department's programs in wildlife education reach more than 30,000 students annually. DGIF conducts teacher in-service training workshops that are tied to the Standards of Learning, which support the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. The Outdoor Education and Hunter Education provide safety and introductory outdoor skills sessions to more than 45,000 participants annually. *Virginia Wildlife* magazine is published monthly and offers an array of information about hunting, fishing, boating and wildlife-related recreation. Currently there are 45,000 subscribers, and every public school in Virginia receives a complimentary copy of the magazine each month.

Law enforcement

DGIF has the responsibility to enforce all laws and regulations for the protection, propagation and preservation of wildlife species, including all fish in the inland waters of the Commonwealth. DGIF also enforces the boating laws of the state for compliance and safety.

Nongame Wildlife Program

In 1981, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation giving taxpayers the option to donate a portion of their tax refunds to The Endangered Species and Non-Game Wildlife Fund. This fund helps support the DGIF Nongame Wildlife Program. The term "nongame wildlife" generally includes all species that are not actively sought by hunters, trappers or anglers. This includes more than 90 percent of the approximately 1,000 vertebrate species occurring in the Commonwealth, and virtually all of the thousands of native invertebrates. This tremendous variety of

species includes such animals as the regal fritillary butterfly, Virginia fringed mountain snail, pimpleback mussel, Roanoke logperch, carpenter frog, oak toad, eastern tiger salamander, timber rattlesnake, chicken turtle, eastern box turtle, Atlantic loggerhead sea turtle, Wilson's plover, great egret, cliff swallow, blue jay, bald eagle, short-tailed shrew, hoary bat, Delmarva fox squirrel and eastern chipmunk.

The primary components of the Nongame Wildlife Program include species and community research, species recovery planning and management, wildlife community inventories and surveys, interagency consultations, development of nongame wildlife regulations, and public education and assistance.

Projects include:

- Monitoring the nesting of bald eagles and peregrine falcons and implementing management actions to ensure their success.
- Conducting or funding surveys for species such as breeding shorebirds, colonial water birds, native crayfishes, calling frogs and toads, and endangered bats.
- Research propagation and augmentation of endangered freshwater mussel populations.
- Investigating the life history of species such as canebrake rattlesnakes, Roanoke logperch, bog turtles, northern flying squirrels and dwarf wedgemussels.
- Implementing interagency recovery programs for red-cockaded woodpeckers, Delmarva fox squirrels, bald eagles and freshwater mussels.

Environmental review

DGIF also participates in the interagency review and coordination of environmental permit applications and project assessments coordinated through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, the Virginia Department of Transportation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other state and federal agencies. DGIF's primary role in these projects is to determine likely impacts on fish and wildlife resources and habitats and to recommend appropriate measures to avoid, reduce or compensate for those impacts. This review process is linked to the computerized Virginia

Fish and Wildlife Information System (VAFWIS) (see www.vafwis.org), which contains information about the natural histories and surveyed locations of more than 3,000 vertebrate and invertebrate species.

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

DGIF continues to support and participate in the development and delivery of wildlife viewing opportunities for Virginians and visitors. Currently, four birding and wildlife festivals are co-sponsored with local partners. These festivals promote wildlife conservation awareness and education while providing opportunities for wildlife viewing activities. The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, the first statewide wildlife viewing trail in the United States, was completed in 2004. This driving trail links together more than 650 of the state's wildlife viewing areas. The department provides technical assistance to landowners to provide public access for wildlife viewing and works with localities and local partners to improve wildlife viewing habitat for public enjoyment. In addition, the Wildlife Mapping Program and the new Virginia Master Naturalist Program (in coordination with four other state agencies) continue to promote volunteer participation in wildlife conservation efforts.

Specific site recommendations for additional water access and wildlife management areas will be found for each regional section (see Chapter X).



The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail is the first statewide wildlife viewing trail in the United States. Photo by DGIF.